

# *Late-Night Licensing*

*The Game and Fish Department hopes more anglers and hunters will sit down at their computers to buy their licenses in 2002. It benefits the agency, but more importantly, it benefits the buyers.*

## **Online Purchasing Offers Comfort, Convenience and More**

**Story and Photos By Craig Bihrlé**

Despite the serious situation at the time, Carrie Whitney can't help but chuckle when she remembers the phone call.

On the other end of the line was one of the many hunters and anglers who lose their license during the course of any year. In her position as licensing supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Whitney handles many such calls, mostly from people who just want to know what to do next.

But this particular gentleman was noticeably on edge. "The guy was on his cell phone, going through the cattails or brush, looking for a license he lost while hunting," Whitney explained, guessing the hunter must have bagged some birds, then discovered he didn't have a license to show should he be checked when exiting the field. "You could hear him looking for it out there...he sounded out of breath, he was just frantic."

Last year, more than 2,000 North Dakota hunters and anglers suffered similar anxieties upon discovering a license lost. Most followed the time-consuming process of applying for and receiving a duplicate license. Others just buy a new license, a more costly but more immediate alternative than applying for a duplicate.

Anglers and hunters can avoid most of these potential headaches by purchasing licenses online, at the Game and Fish Department's web site.

The convenience of buying online, from the comfort of your own home, at any hour of the day, without having to stand in line, is obvious. The greatest benefit, however, is a feature that most online license buyers won't even use – the ability to print a new license if you lose or misplace the first one.

In addition, each online license purchase is stored electronically and linked to a verification number. Technically, hunters and anglers only need to carry the license number, and even without that, a game warden can still quickly verify whether an individual bought the appropriate license.

If the cell-phone-wielding hunter searching the cattails for a lost license had bought his license online, he could have continued to hunt without worry...unless, of course, his license was in his billfold, along with cash and credit cards, buried in the mud somewhere.

### Online Licensing Catching On

The Game and Fish Department first began selling licenses on its web site two years ago. Business started out slow, but increased steadily as consumers discovered the convenience and gained confidence in the security of sending credit card numbers over the internet.

In April 2000, Game and Fish sold \$9,267 worth of licenses on its web site, primarily to resident anglers. In October 2000 the web site took in about \$350,000, a majority of which came from nonresident hunters. Total income for the year, not including lottery applications, was \$681,530.

In 2001, the numbers just about doubled. Total income reached \$1.36 million. October again generated the most activity at \$696,000.

While residents and nonresidents have equal access to the internet, nonresidents make much greater use of the Game and Fish online licensing feature. In 2001, the site sold 14,592 nonresident license certificates, required of all license buyers. (Attached to these are all the fishing, small game, general game, sportsman's and other licenses.) That's about one of every four nonresidents who bought any

kind of license. Residents bought 5,572 certificates online, only about three percent of total resident certificates issued. Since nonresident licenses cost more, the overwhelming majority of money that comes to Game and Fish via the internet comes from nonresidents.

That's not particularly surprising, says Paul Schadewald, chief of administrative services, because nonresident licenses – particularly hunting licenses – aren't available at every vendor. What is surprising, Schadewald notes, is that more residents haven't used the service, considering more than half the households in the state have internet access.

Advantages are more than just convenience, an electronic record, and the ability to print duplicate licenses. Most vendors tack on a 50-cent service charge to every license sold. Residents who buy hunting and fishing licenses separately end up paying a dollar in service charges that don't exist on web site sales.

"We encourage residents to use it more," Schadewald stated, "because it's a good deal for them, too."

### Lost Licenses

Just about every hunter or angler has at least temporarily misplaced a license at one time or another, with the ensuing anxiety level based on the timing of his or her next outing. Fortunately, most folks find their license and don't have to go through the process of securing a duplicate.

If it does come to that, people have several options. All of them involve filling out a duplicate license application that must be processed through the Bismarck Game and Fish office. To validate the application, the licensee's signature must be notarized.

Applications are available at Game and Fish and county auditor offices, and on the Department's web site. While duplicate licenses are usually received, processed and mailed out from the Bismarck office on the same day, depending on where you live and timing of regular mail delivery, replacing a lost license can take from 1-5 days. Plus, each type of duplicate license comes with a fee.

While turning on a computer, logging onto the internet and going through all the links to print a new license might take 10-15 minutes, that's a minor bother compared to securing a duplicate license. Resourceful online license buyers go ahead and print multiple licenses right

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# Really, it's as easy as 1...2...3...4...5



**1** Log onto Game and Fish web site at [www.discovernd.com/gnfl/](http://www.discovernd.com/gnfl/). Click on "Instant Licensing on the Web."

**2** Select resident or nonresident and the proper year, then click "Purchase Here" tab.

away, and distribute them in likely places such as a billfold or purse, tackle box, vehicle glove box or inside a pocket of a favorite hunting coat.

However, hunters who have licenses issued in the form of tags, such as turkey, deer, antelope, etc., still need to have one paper license on which to attach these special licenses. A hunter must have the license and accompanying tag in possession while hunting these species. For instance, if you lose the certificate to which you've attached your fall turkey license, you can print another certificate that lists the necessary small game and general game licenses. The replacement turkey license and tag still must come from the Bismarck Game and Fish Department office, through an application. In 2001, 16 turkey hunters had to endure this process, as well as more than 300 deer hunters.

"We haven't figured out a way to send tags over the internet...yet," Schadewald said.

The same scenario applies to the federal waterfowl stamp. If you lose the certificate to which the duck stamp is attached, you can print a new certificate, but you still need to buy another duck stamp at a post office or other outlet.

## Lotteries Online

In addition to offering license sales online, the Game and Fish web site also features lottery applications. Applying for moose, deer or antelope online doesn't improve the odds of drawing a license, but it does save the Department time and money on the data processing end.

Last year, more than 11,000 hunters – almost all residents – applied online for the first deer lottery. Those applications in paper form would make a formidable

## Real Savings

Two dollars doesn't buy much these days, but it does buy something. Here's an example of how an internet license purchase saved me \$2.

My father, who lives out of state, was visiting one weekend in January and we decided to go icefishing for northern pike. He needed a three-day nonresident license for \$10. Along with that, he also needed the \$2 nonresident license certificate.

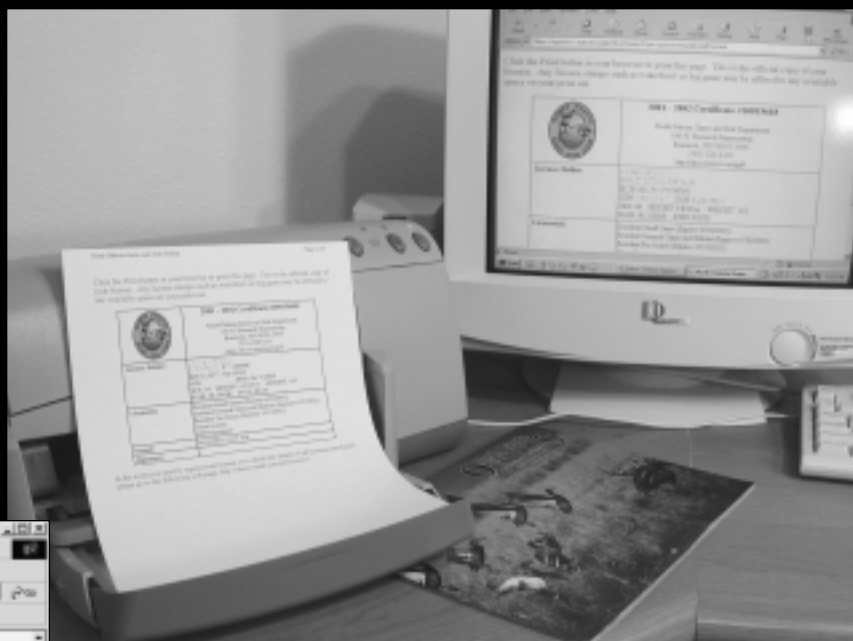
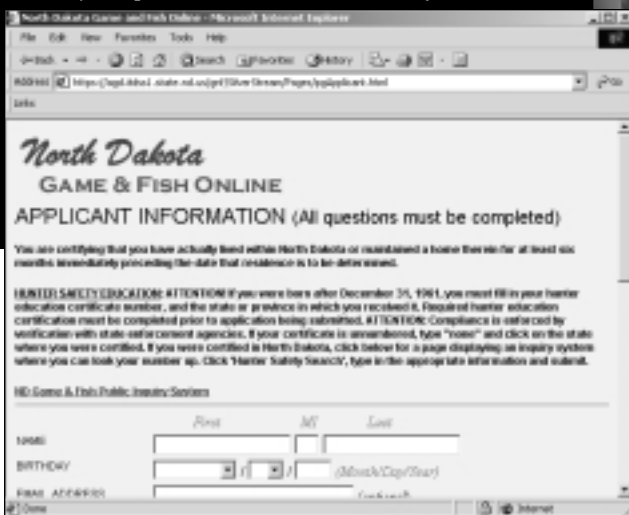
Having hunted ducks in North Dakota last fall, however, he had already bought one certificate, but he didn't have it along. Fortunately, he bought his small game and waterfowl licenses online. We logged on to the Game and Fish home page, clicked to the appropriate page, typed in the necessary birth date and identification number, and printed another hunting license, which verified purchase of the certificate.

Mission accomplished. Two dollars saved. Dad bought the minnows. – Craig



**3** Check the type or types of licenses you need.

Fill in your personal and credit card information. **4**



**5** Wait a few seconds for the Game and Fish web site to send back your verification number, then print your license.

stack that would take several processors a week to enter in the lottery drawing database. Online application allowed the Department to hold the first deer drawing a week earlier than normal, and also saved considerable money. "It (online applications) really helps us on the data entry," Schadewald emphasized.

## Popular with Customers

Most people who use the Department's online licensing or application features are pleased with the experience.

"I just finished purchasing my 2001-02 nonresident hunting license online," wrote one satisfied customer from Minnesota, "and simply had to express to you how thoroughly impressed I was with this feature. It never ceases to amaze me how you folks can consistently be on the cutting edge of things like this, notwithstanding the fact that you operate on a budget that is a fraction of your neighboring states, mine included."

And this from a content resident. "Your application system rocks! The design and operation of your web site is truly money well spent."

While web site licensing and applications are popular with the people who use it, Schadewald noted, the Game and Fish Department hopes that more and more hunters and anglers will discover the ease and convenience of taking care of licensing business online. It's quick, it's easy, it can usually save a dollar or two, and in the case of a lost license, it can even prevent panic.

**CRAIG BIHRLE** is the Game and Fish Department's communications supervisor.

## Internet License Sales Comparison

(in dollars)

(Does not include lottery applications)

April 2000	.....\$9,267
April 2001	.....\$23,465
October 2000	.....\$350,552
October 2001	.....\$696,082
2000 Grand Total	.....\$681,530
2001 Grand Total	.....\$1,362,618